

Update on the tennis courts October 2022

The tennis courts are a well-used and valuable part of the Upper Park. As elected councillors for the ward, we would never knowingly jeopardise their future nor allow them to be taken away. As we've previously stated, the proposal is not to 'sell' them to the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) nor 'privatise' them but to enable investment to take place to improve the quality, maintenance to guarantee their future and promote access to all, including those not currently playing the sport. The LTA offer includes £63,000 for refurbishment and SELT (South East London Tennis) will be reaching out to marginalised groups to make use of our courts more inclusive. The Council has been successfully working with SELT to this end elsewhere in the borough.

The trade-off is for charging to be implemented, and a booking system put in place. Undoubtedly, this is a fundamental change, and we recognise the strength of feeling from many within the community who wish to maintain free, as-available access to the courts. We also know that other local residents support the change. The strength of feeling here is equally strong.

As local elected representatives we work as a team. We have sought to ensure that all opinions can be publically expressed and heard. We did this six years ago when the Council first mooted the idea of a working relationship with the LTA. We have done this more recently both by attending the consultation meetings organised by the Friends of Telegraph Hill Park (FoTHP) in liaison with the Council, and through chairing a meeting of current court users seeking to maintain existing arrangements.

On reflection, it may be that the consultation should have been directly organised by the Council with councillors fronting the meetings. It might have made it easier for different views to be expressed in the room together. NB: In making this statement we are not making any negative comments about the consultation undertaken by FoTHP.

Cllr Paul Bell has written about the representations made on behalf of the three ward councillors here <https://www.paulbell.org/single-post/latest-on-the-telegraph-hill-tennis-courts>. As your local representatives and local residents, the three of us have slightly different personal opinions on the proposals. However, we do not doubt that the Council is acting in the community's best interests, even though not everyone agrees with the objectives.

So, where are we now? Ward councillors have made representations to Cllr Andre Bourne, the cabinet member responsible for the parks to see if further consultation would be helpful. As residents know, the proposal is long in the making, and the scheme is likely to go ahead. Paul, Joan and Luke need to be honest about where we are at the moment, notwithstanding the representations we are making; we are now at the end of the process.

That leaves us with how to guarantee access to households with less income to pay for the £35 per year fee. We are advised it is happening elsewhere. Ward councillors have requested to see the proposals for enabling all income groups to continue to access the tennis courts.

Once we receive further updates, we will post on our Facebook page here <https://www.facebook.com/THcllrs/>.

Cllr Paul Bell, Cllr Joan Millbank and Cllr Luke Sorba

17 October 2022